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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

16 May 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR THE BOARD

FROM: [REDACTED] 25X1A

SUBJECT: Stalinist Doctrine on the Role of Capitalistic Economic  
Depressions in Relation to War and to World Revolution

Communists have traditionally believed simultaneously in the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism while advocating and carrying out the most active measures to promote the proletarian revolution throughout the world. According to the original Marxian doctrine capitalism holds within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Thus inexorable economic forces would bring about the collapse of capitalism. This collapse of international capitalism would be coincident with a revolutionary situation in which the seizure of power through the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would occur.

The vital question is: To what extent is this theory of the nature of the World Revolution and of the collapse of capitalism still held by Stalinist Communists and to what extent are these ideas or those later developed from them at present of critical importance in determining the foreign policy of the Kremlin?

There is a long ideological history of these ideas involving, among other matters, the Stalin-Trotsky controversy. Stalin's doctrine of the feasibility of setting up a socialist society in Russia, even though the Communist revolution failed to take place in other capitalistic countries, was in conflict during the late twenties and early thirties with Trotsky's doctrine of the impossibility of establishing socialism in Russia without the success of world-wide revolution. Stalin's insistence upon building up the power of the Soviet regime in Russia, in contrast to Trotsky's insistence upon support of international revolutionary movements, was one element in the struggle which finally led to Trotsky's exile by Stalin.

The great series of purges of the Communist Party in Russia which reached their climax in 1937 and 1938 largely eliminated the "Old Bolsheviks" who still regarded themselves as torch bearers

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of the World Revolution. The members of the leadership hierarchy who survived and the new members who have since come to power in Soviet Russia consider themselves today as the functionaries of an established society. Stalin nevertheless did not unequivocally repudiate the doctrine either of the desirability of pushing forward with the World Revolution or of the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism since to do so would have meant an unacceptable break with Marxist and Leninist doctrine. Neither one of these doctrines has, however, played a major role in the policies which he has followed since the time of his controversy with Trotsky.

It is difficult to make a coherent statement with regard to current Stalinist doctrine on the relation between (a) capitalistic economic crises,\* (b) war and (c) the final collapse of capitalism. Stalinist Communists in general follow the line that capitalism suffers from a chronic lack of markets and that the danger of economic depression drives capitalistic countries towards preparation for war and to war itself in an effort to prop up the demand for goods produced by capitalists. Under modern present-day circumstances, however, preparation for war or war itself is directed by capitalist countries against the Soviet Union. This situation was naturally not foreseen in the original Marxian doctrine.

While preparations for war by capitalistic countries go on, there will, of course, be no collapse of capitalism due to lack of markets. If war results it will be against the Soviet Union. The Stalinists would assume that this would result in the military defeat of the capitalist powers and the collapse of capitalism. This is fine from the standpoint of Stalinist doctrine but it lends no support to the doctrine of the collapse of capitalism without war. To the extent that it is believed, it does offer support for the doctrine that the Soviet regime regards itself as in constant danger of war with the capitalist powers.

The weight of evidence leads to the following conclusions:

1. The weight which the Kremlin currently gives to the doctrine that the capitalistic United States is motivated in its preparation for war by the fear of the failure of markets in

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\*There has been a lively controversy on this subject both during and since World War II. Varga and Voznessensky were the principal disputants. Both have been "slapped down" at various times. Voznessensky has disappeared.

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the absence of such preparation for war is uncertain. (During the early days of the Marshall Plan, the Soviet propaganda line was that we were making funds available to European countries to buy our goods because we were unable to sell them in the United States.) If this is the Soviet belief, it would be logical to reason that so long as US preparation for war continues there will be no economic depression and no collapse of capitalism. The only alternative to the US continuing its preparation for war would be war itself since the US would presumably wish to prevent economic collapse. This line of reasoning would, however, present no support for Soviet reliance upon the collapse of capitalism at some later time in the indefinite future.

2. Neither Stalin nor other members of the Soviet hierarchy regard themselves as revolutionists with an inner compulsion to carry forward the World Revolution to decisive success. Stalin and the functionaries of the present Soviet collectivist regime instead regard themselves primarily as protectors and aggrandizers of that state.

3. The Cominform nevertheless is, as its predecessor the Comintern was, a useful tool to serve Soviet interests. Communist parties throughout the world are used simply as agents of Soviet foreign policy. (There has been the one case of successful resistance to Kremlin orders in the case of Tito. Furthermore it is likely that the Communist regime in China is not in all respects under the complete control of the Kremlin.)

The above analysis does not contribute in any very pointed fashion to determining the current military and foreign policy intentions of the Kremlin. To the extent that the Kremlin is no longer dominated by a zeal for carrying out the revolutionary goals of the day of Lenin and Trotsky, this motive for Soviet expansion disappears. On the other hand the reliance upon the inevitability of capitalistic collapse without war is fundamentally weakened also.

Finally evidence is lacking as to whether the Kremlin takes these philosophic matters into serious account in the realm of real politik. What seems much more important is what can be adduced from actual events during the decades since the October Revolution of 1917. That these events reflect a single-minded determination upon the part of Soviet leadership to protect its security and to expand its power can hardly be disputed. It is probable that the Kremlin does not, and perhaps cannot, consider

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security separately from the expansion of its power. Theories of the possibility of the collapse of capitalism through economic depressions do not seem likely to be of critical importance both at a time of highest economic production and standard of living in the history of capitalism and when the rival armies of Soviet Russia and the West stand at the alert.

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Dear Bill:

Here is the piece on the Soviet attitude towards the doctrine of the collapse of capitalism. It is not written for inclusion in NIE-25. It seemed useless for me to prepare anything for that purpose until the Board had a chance to understand my point of view.

I should actually recommend that it not be included in NIE-25 at all, or, if it should be done, that I now reduce it down to about two paragraphs.

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